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## BSE Risk Assessment

In April of 1998, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) entered into a cooperative agreement with Harvard University's Center for Risk Analysis at the School of Public Health to begin an analysis and evaluation of USDA's measures to prevent Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE). Harvard developed a computer-based simulation model to characterize the consequences of the introduction of BSE into the United States by various means. The analysis finds that the United States is highly resistant to the introduction of BSE. In addition, should it occur in this country, measures taken by government and industry make the United States robust against the spread of BSE to animals or humans.

- No BSE has been detected in U.S. cattle, nor has a human case of vCJD been reported in the U.S.
- USDA has been working for many years to put in place preventive measures – a firewall – to keep BSE from entering the cattle and food supply. As a result, the potential for human exposure to BSE in the United States is quite low.
- USDA commissioned the risk assessment to evaluate the preventive measures already in place and whether they need to be strengthened and whether other measures need to be implemented.
- Our goal is to bring the risk as close to zero as possible.

### Actions USDA Will Announce on BSE

Based on its preliminary review of the of the BSE risk assessment, USDA will take the following actions:

First, USDA will arrange for the risk assessment to be peer-reviewed by a team of outside experts to validate its scientific integrity. These experts will look at whether the data have been correctly interpreted and whether the computer model can be used easily by USDA scientists to evaluate "what if" scenarios.

Second, USDA will continue increasing testing for BSE, with more than 12,500 cattle samples targeted in fiscal year 2002—up from 5,000 during fiscal year 2001. Surveillance is a critical part of USDA's multifaceted strategy.

Third, USDA will soon announce the availability of an options paper in the *Federal Register* that will outline additional possible regulatory actions to limit the risk of BSE exposure. To ensure these options are science-based, they will be tested using the computer model developed by Harvard to see what impact they would have on further reducing risk. The options will include: prohibiting the use of brain and spinal cord from specified cattle in human food; prohibiting the use of central nervous system tissue in boneless beef products, including meat from advanced meat recovery systems; and prohibiting the use of the vertebral column from certain categories of cattle, including downed animals, in the production of meat from advanced meat recovery systems. USDA will invite public comment on the options and then proceed with appropriate regulatory actions.

Fourth, USDA will propose to prohibit the use of certain stunning devices used to immobilize cattle during slaughter.

Fifth, USDA will publish an advance notice of proposed rulemaking to consider disposal options for dead and downer animals, because such cattle are considered an important potential pathway for the spread of BSE in the animal chain.

### Key Contacts

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